

SOL 5c - The student will demonstrate knowledge of the factors that shaped colonial America by describing life colonial life in America from the perspectives of large landowners, farmers, artisans, women, free African Americans, indentured servants, and enslaved African Americans.

Life was different in the three colonial regions. In fact, the colonies were made up of different people whose lives varied depending on their social position. Let's learn about the different social classes in Colonial America!

One of the wealthiest social positions in colonial America was held by **large landowners** called *planters*. These powerful men lived mainly in the southern colonies and were usually well educated. They owned huge farms called **plantations**. These impressive plantations were filled with barns, stables, gardens, wells, workshops, kitchens, mills, and slave quarters. To keep these farms running smoothly, planters needed huge numbers of low cost laborers. Indentured servants and enslaved African Americans provided the cheapest labor.

Farmers held another social position in colonial America. These men, although they were not wealthy like the planters, were often respected members of the community. They farmed the land of their region and often depended on family members for labor.

Artisans were another social class in colonial America. These craftsmen, which included silversmiths, carpenters, masons, shipwrights, coopers, candle makers, blacksmiths and tailors, often lived above their shops. These shops were located in villages, towns, cities, and even plantations.

A fourth social class included **women**. In colonial America a woman's main roles were homemaker and caretaker. Her days were filled with cooking, cleaning, laundering and caring for children. Colonial women, whether rich or poor, had few privileges. They were often not given the opportunity to go to school and were not allowed to vote.

Free African Americans made up a smaller social group in Colonial America. They had more economic freedom than both the indentured servants and the enslaved African Americans. They could work for pay and decide how to spend the money they earned. They were also allowed to own land. Free African Americans, however, were not allowed to vote.

A less respected social class in colonial America consisted of **indentured servants**. Indentured servants were usually young men and women who wanted to go to the colonies but did not have enough money. They would agree to work without pay for the person who paid for their passage. They often worked as laborers, field hands, craftsmen, and housekeepers and were given their freedom at the end of their contract.

The least respected social class was the **enslaved African American**. These men and women were captured in their native country and sold to slave traders. They were then shipped from Africa to the colonies. Once in America, they were sold into slavery. Unlike indentured servants, enslaved African Americans were owned for life. They were considered the property of their owner and were given no rights or opportunities for an education. Children of enslaved African Americans were also born into slavery.

